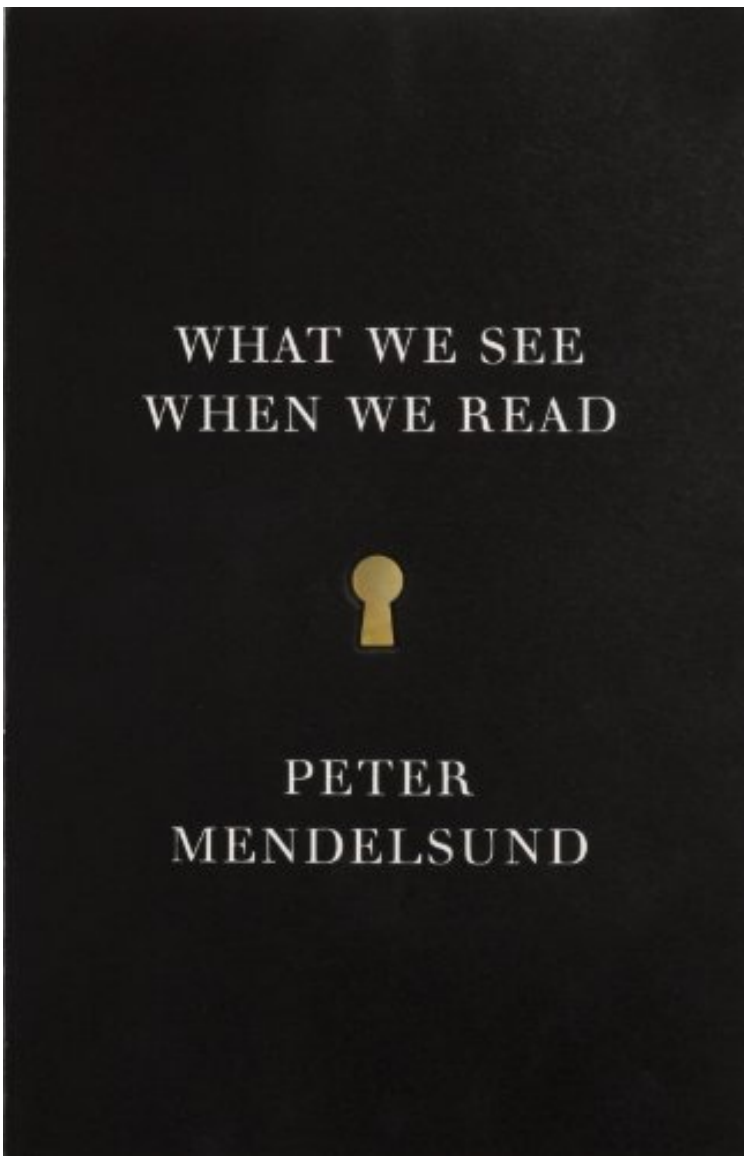


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What We See When We Read



Par Peter Mendelsund
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA San Francisco Chronicleand Kirkus Best Book of the YearA gorgeously unique, fully illustrated exploration into the phenomenology of readinghow we visualize images from reading works of literature, from one of our very best book jacket designers, himself a passionate reader. What do we see when we read? Did Tolstoy really describe Anna Karenina? Did Melville ever really tell us what, exactly, Ishmael looked like? The collection of fragmented images on a pagea graceful ear there, a stray curl, a hat positioned just soand other clues and signifiers helps us to create an image of a character. But in fact our sense that we know a character intimately has little to do with our ability to concretely picture our belovedor reviledliterary figures. In this remarkable work of nonfiction, Knopf's Associate Art Director Peter

Mendelsund combines his profession, as an award-winning designer; his first career, as a classically trained pianist; and his first love, literature he considers himself first and foremost as a reader into what is sure to be one of the most provocative and unusual investigations into how we understand the act of reading. From the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait

A proposition is a picture of reality. a proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* I don't think I shall ever forget my first sight of Hercule Poirot. of course, i got used to him later on, but to begin with it was a shock... i don't know what i'd imagined ... of course, i knew he was a foreigner, but i hadn't expect- ed him to be quite as foreign as he was, if you know what i mean. When you saw him you just wanted to laugh! he was like something on the stage or at the pictures. Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia* Writing ... is but a different name for conversation. as no one, who knows what he is about in good compa- ny, would venture to talk all; so no author, who under- stands the just boundaries of decorum and good breed- ing, would presume to think all: the truest respect which you can pay to the readers understanding is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do, deceiving elf. John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale* PICTURING" PICTURING" i could begin with Lily Briscoe. Lily Briscoe With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered up face... is a principle character in Vir- ginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. Lily is a painter. She is painting a picture throughout the course of the narrative a painting of Mrs. Ramsey sitting by the window reading to her son James. Lily has set up her easel outside on the lawn and she paints while various players flit and charge about the property. She is nervous about being interrupted, about some- one breaking her concentration whilst engaged in this delicate act. the idea that someone would interrogate her about the painting is intolerable. But kind, acceptable Mr. Bankes wanders up, exam- ines her work, and asks What did she mean to indi- cate by the triangular purple shape, just there? it is meant to be Mrs. Ramsey, reading to her son, though "no one could tell it for a human shape." Mother and child then objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow... Mother and child: reduced. We never see this picture (the picture Lily paints in Virginia Woolf's novel.) We are only told about it. Lily is painting the scene that we, as readers, are being asked to imagine. (We are asked to imagine both: the scene and its painted likeness.) *** This might be a good place to begin: with the picture that Lily paints; with its shapes, smudges, and shadows. the painting is Lily's depiction of the tableau in front of her reading of it. i cannot see the scene that Lily is attempting to capture. i cannot see Lily herself. The scene and its occupants are blurred. Strangely, the painting seems more... vivid. *** FICCTIONS What do we see when we read? (Other than words on a page.) What do we picture in our minds? There is a story called "reading." We all know this story. It is a story of pictures, and of picturing. The story of reading is a remembered story. When we read, we are immersed. And the more we are immersed the more we are preoccupied the less we are able, in the moment, to bring our analytic minds to bear upon the experience we are absorbed in. Thus, when we discuss the feeling of reading, we are really talking about the memory of having read. * And this memory of reading is a false memory. * William James describes the impossible attempt to introspectively examine our own consciousness as "trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks." *Revue de presse* Praise for *What We See When We Read*: A playful, illustrated treatise on how words give rise to mental images. . . . Mendelsund argues that reading is an act of co-creation, and that our impressions of characters and places owe as much to our own memory and experience as to the descriptive powers of authors. . . . [What We See When We Read] explore[s] the peculiar challenges of transforming words into images, and blend[s] illustrations with philosophy, literary criticism and design theory. Alexandra Alter, *The New York Times* Mendelsund, throughout this thought-provoking book, helps the lay reader contemplate text in ways you hadnt thought about previously. *Los Angeles Times* A conversation piece, created to entice repeated thumb-throughs. . . . [The author is] a highly regarded book-jacket designer. . . . Reading is often considered (especially by those who dont love to do it) a passive activity. But Cambridge native Mendelsund . . . makes a nice case that it is, in fact, a kind of active collaboration. . . . *What We See When We Read*, itself a work of conceptual design, unfolds the authors ideas about what makes reading a creative, visual act all its own on page some packed with text, others just a line or two that incorporate sketches, clip art, images of classic book covers and more. *The Boston Globe* "A welcome and fascinating new book." *The New York of Books* The liveliest, most entertaining and best illustrated work of phenomenology you'll pick up this year. An acclaimed book-jacket designer and art director, Mendelsund investigates, through words and pictures, what we see when we read text and where those images come from. His breakdown of the reading

and visualizing processes yields many insights. . . . Playfully, he offers us a police composite sketch of Anna, based on the description in Tolstoy's novel. Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel "Wow. . . . Mendelsund has changed the way I think about reading. Like the Wizard of Oz tornado, Mendelsund's lucid, questing prose and his surprising, joyful visuals collide to create a similar weather system inside the reader. Not only are you carried off to Oz, but you're aware at every moment of the cyclonic action of your reader's mind and your reader's imagination. It's so smart, so totally original, so beautiful. This is the perfect gift for anyone who has ever blinked awake inside a book." Karen Russell, author of *Swamplandia!* [Mendelsund] produces a kaleidoscopic, immersive experience that successfully combines text, graphics, illustrations, cover images and more into a cohesive whole. It's a book to be read, reread, shown to perspective graphic designers and shared. Kirkus [A] sort of epistemological exercise that, at its best, calls all sorts of associations to mind. It

summons a mental flood. . . . Mendelsund is an adept memoirist; the personal material in this book resonates. He notes that we can read novels quickly, as if driving through them, or slowly, as if walking, and have distinct experiences. . . . [He] keeps his tone light while thinking deliberately about fundamental things.

Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* Mendelsund, one of the truly great book-cover designers, explores what we see when we read, in a volume packed with stunning visuals. It's a fascinating and enlightening look at something we might not actually realize we're thinking about with every word we read. Flavorwire "A

deconstruction of the visual experience of reading, a heady mixture of philosophy and neuropsychology. . . . Peter Mendelsund is astonishingly good at what he does." *The Rumpus* "Amazing. . . . Sparkling with verbal as well as visual wit and the personable exhilaration of one of the best conversations you've ever had, *What*

We See When We Read opens one's eyes to that special brand of blindness which makes the vividness of fiction possible. It reads as if the ghost of Italo Calvino audited Vladimir Nabokov's literature class and wrote his final paper with the help of Alvin Lustig and the Radiolab guys." Chris Ware, author of *Building Stories* Quirky and fascinating. . . . Mendelsund draws our attention to things we may not be fully conscious

of when we immerse ourselves in a narrative. . . . *We See When We Read* will make passionate readers think about things they may largely take for granted when absorbed in a book and spark further thoughts about what the pleasurable experience of reading is all about. *BookPage* Intriguing. . . . A truly remarkable book.

Coolhunting.com In this brilliant amalgam of philosophy, psychology, literary theory and visual art, Knopf associate art director and cover designer Mendelsund inquires about the complex process of reading. . . . The book exemplifies the idea that reading is not a linear process. Even if readers follow consecutive words, they

incorporate into reading memories, distractions, predispositions, desires and expectations. . . . In 19 brief, zesty chapters, the author considers such topics as the relationship of reading to time, skill, visual acuity, fantasy, synesthesia and belief. . . . Mendelsund amply attains his goal to produce a quirky, fresh and

altogether delightful meditation on the miraculous act of reading. Kirkus (starred) A delightful treat for the avid reader. . . . [A] topsy-turvy illustrated marvel. . . . [Mendelsund] maps the dreamscape of reading to show us how the mirage dissolves under close scrutiny but its memory still burns brilliant. What a tangible

magic books are! Shelf Awareness Offhandedly brilliant, witty, and fluent in the works of Tolstoy, Melville, Joyce, and Woolf, Mendelsund guides us through an intricate and enlivening analysis of why literature and reading are essential to our understanding of ourselves, each other, and the spinning world. *Booklist* This

examination of how words on a page become pictures in our brains is blowing my mind a little in the best possible way. *BookRiot* "This is not a book, this is a sacred text. It inspires, it expands the mind, it proves that Mendelsund is a total freaking genius." Heidi Julavits, author of *The Vanishers* "Brilliant. Peter

Mendelsund has peered into our messy heads and produced an illuminating, kaleidoscopic meditation on reading. Also on seeing. And understanding." Jim Gleick, bestselling author of *The Information* "Peter Mendelsund is to the art of book design what Walter Murch is to the art of film-editing. That, of course, is

the highest praise imaginable." Geoff Dyer, author of *Another Great Day at Sea* Praise for Peter Mendelsund's work: "He's the exact visual correlative of what I think contemporary literature should be, but usually isn't doing." Tom McCarthy "Peter Mendelsund pushes the visual and the verbal into unforeseen

alliances. These alliances feel inevitable, establishing exactly the right balance between the timely and the timeless." Jed Perl "When I first spoke with Peter, after he'd begun work on the jacket for *The Flame*

Alphabet, I was struck by how carefully he'd read the book. . . . To have it from a designer is unnerving and, of course, a piece of very good luck. When he asked me if there was anything I had in mind for the jacket, I

knew by that point that I did not want to get in his way or even to put my voice in his head. I wanted an original Mendelsund." Ben Marcus "Once in a while I'm presented with design that crosses the barriers of cultural references and visual language that feels universal that feels like the perfect start to the story; design

that I don't want to reader to forget, but to carry with them. These designs are Peter Mendelsund's." Jo Nesb
"All of Peter's covers are funny, smart, and beautiful. And all of them say something about the visual nature
of reading, writing, and perception. Each one is a poem. Look at them closely." Jane Mendelsohn